



November 2015

Caregiver Support Newsletter

Tribute to Our Nation's Caregivers

November is National Family Caregivers Month, which began in 1994 as a week-long event inaugurated by the National Family Caregiver Association. President Clinton signed the first Presidential Proclamation in 1997, and each successive president has followed suit. Now, we set aside a month to honor and celebrate the invaluable contributions caregivers make to families and community.*

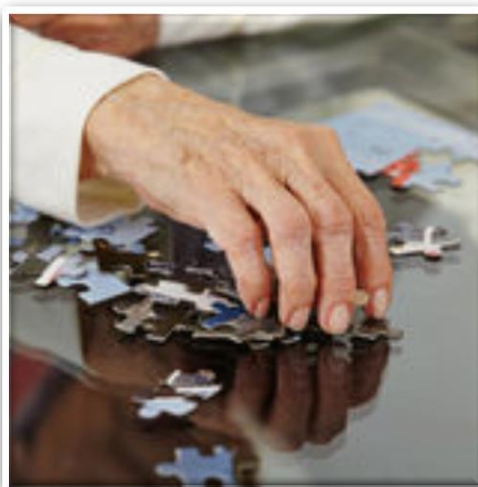
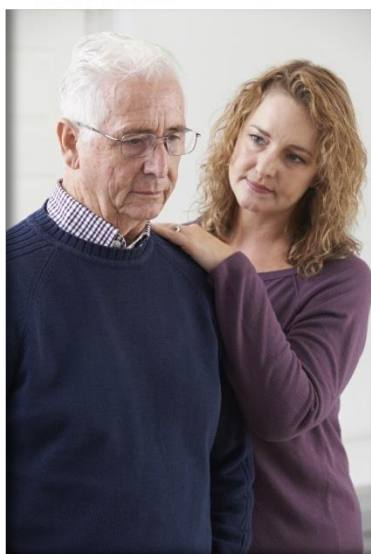
In last year's proclamation, President Obama writes:

"Together, we recognize those who place service above self, including the women and men looking after our veterans. By offering them the same comfort, social engagement, and stability they bring to others, may we remind them that they are not alone."



The VA Caregiver Support Program has developed educational and supportive programs to assist caregivers in developing new skill sets, understanding the importance of self-care, and connecting with the appropriate resources which help avoid "caregiver burnout," help caregivers feel less isolated, and help caregivers achieve a sense of balance to their lives. This year's National Family Caregivers Month Presidential Proclamation will be released in November 2015.

*American Society on Aging excerpt



UPCOMING EVENTS

April 27, 2016 Caregiver Classes

Managing Stress for Family Caregivers

(9:00-Noon)

What You Will Learn:

- To Identify the Sources of Stress in your Life;
- To Change Negative Self-Talk to Positive Stress Management Skills

Problem Solving and Effective Communication for Caregivers

(1:00-4:00 pm)

What You Will Learn:

- A 5-step approach to Problem Solving;
- To Apply these 5-steps to any Problem You are Facing;
- To Communicate Assertively; Communication Skills

Location:
Iowa Works,
3 Triton Circle
Fort Dodge, Iowa 50501

Questions?
Contact: Lisa Niewoehner
(515) 574-5991



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

*As a Caregiver,
the very best
thing you can
do for those
who depend on
you is to take
care of yourself.*

Your importance as a Family Caregiver cannot be overestimated and we want to focus on what you can do for yourself to keep life fulfilling and happy for you and your family. Caregiving does not occur in a vacuum. In addition to being the Family Caregiver of a Veteran, you may also look out for other family members, parents, siblings, in-laws and children. And, you may have a job, too. It is imperative to take steps to keep yourself physically and emotionally healthy. You will also find in this article some tips related to your roles in meeting your family's needs and in the work place. A theme to remember: resources exist all around you that can be of help to you and the Veteran you care for. Over the past decade there has been more attention to the important role that Family Caregivers play in the lives of both Veterans and non-Veterans. We have learned a lot about what helps a Caregiver carry on this valuable role and how Caregivers themselves need support.

Staying Healthy

Why Is YOUR Health So Important?

Being a Caregiver requires stamina and good health. The journey is more of a marathon than a sprint and you need to be in the best condition you can be. Taking care of *you* is essential to your own well-being, and is crucial for the Veteran's health and comfort. Because caregiving can be very demanding, Caregivers often don't exercise enough, don't eat a healthy diet, or delay seeking health care for themselves. Yet the demands of caregiving are precisely why a healthy lifestyle is so important. If you are in good physical and mental health, you will be able to handle the challenges that present each day and provide the best care possible to the Veteran. If you ignore your own health, you risk becoming ill. Maintaining your own health is an investment that will pay off for your whole family.



Keys to Staying Healthy

Eating Well

Nutrition affects physical and emotional health. Proper diet helps protect the Caregiver from stress, while poor nutrition can lead to lower immunity and disease. Poor nutrition leads to fatigue, illness and disease. Small changes in diet can have benefits for health and wellbeing



Physical Activity – Move Around!

You don't have to go to a gym to get the benefits of physical activity. The benefits of physical activity include: reduced stress, increased alertness, better sleep and more energy. Any way you move counts!

*Five minutes of almost
any physical activity
offers benefits
lasting hours afterward.*



You can choose activities that are appealing and meaningful to you such as:

- ☐ Stepping outside to do a little gardening.
- ☐ Taking a brisk walk around the block.
- ☐ Exercising to a DVD or video at home when you have time.
- ☐ Doing every day chores has a health benefit.
- ☐ Listening to music while doing chores can help.

Protecting Your Back

Giving physical care increases the risk of getting a back injury. Lifting or helping a person shift from one place to another or moving a heavy or awkward object can seriously strain the back. The good news is that using back-protecting skills works. The key is planning the lift. It's good to take these steps before starting:

1. Think through the whole move — plot it out.
2. Size up whether moving the object or person is truly manageable — if you can't comfortably handle the lift, you shouldn't do it.
3. Identify any obstacles in your way and remove them.
4. Bend your knees and lift with your legs, not your back.
5. Keep the object balanced as you lift.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

As a Family Caregiver, you may be sacrificing your own sleep needs for the needs of your family, including caring for the Veteran. Lack of sleep can make you less alert, impair your productivity and ability to pay attention, reduce your ability to remember new information and slow your reaction times.



*Most healthy adults,
for best performance,
need seven or eight hours
of sleep every night.*

Preventive Health

Preventive health care like vaccinations and screenings, help you stay healthy and identify health problems early. Your family history will give your doctor some clues about the screenings you might need. Catching a problem early will help you take care of it before it impacts your health and takes away from your ability to provide care for the Veteran at home. Most Caregivers are very diligent about the Veteran's doctor's appointments but may postpone scheduling their own. Your health is vital to your veteran's health so it is essential to keep up with your medical needs.

Your Emotional Health

Why Emotional Health is Important

When challenging things happen, emotional health lets you bounce back and move on. Most of us take emotional and mental health for granted and only focus on it when problems occur. But like physical health, it requires attention to build and maintain. *Caregiving is a stressful job!* A Caregiver's emotional health is very important. Chronic stress that doesn't go away can lead to health problems. There are many different tools that can help you achieve balance in your life, with time to relax, enjoy relationships, work and have fun. Let's talk about things Caregivers can do to maintain their emotional health.

- ☐ First, ask for help.
- ☐ Reach out to social contacts.
- ☐ Get some respite from the day-to-day stress and seek out support groups.



Relieving Stress

Probably the simplest way to reduce your stress is to do something you enjoy and find relaxing. Some of these might work well in your life.

- ☐ Go for a walk
- ☐ Spend time outside
- ☐ Take a long, hot bath
- ☐ Play with a pet
- ☐ Work in your garden
- ☐ Curl up with a good book
- ☐ Listen to relaxing music
- ☐ Sweat out tension with a good workout

To read more on how to care for yourself, you can visit http://www.caregiver.va.gov/pdfs/Caregiver_Workbook_V3_Module_1.pdf or ask your Caregiver Support Coordinator for a copy of the full article.

On November 3rd, 2015, our Social Work and Caregiver team hosted another fantastic Caregiver Self-Care Fair in Des Moines and a Caregiver Event at each Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Central Iowa. Staff was onsite to offer resources and an opportunity for our Unsung Heroes to kick-back and relax.



At the main campus, dieticians whipped up some heart healthy chili and an apple treat to show how easy it is to invest in you and your loved one nutritionally. Chair massages, yoga demonstrations, meditation exercises, and Aromatherapy were also available to create a calm and caring environment for those who give so much to our Veterans.



Due to increasing popular demand – the main event in Des Moines grew from the main lobby into our beautiful new auditorium, which offered a tranquil place for our Caregivers to gather. Staff were stationed in the main lobby with informational booths and escorts to walk each of these amazing individuals to the larger fair. It was a wildly successful event and we can't wait to honor our Caregivers again next year! Remember, November is National Caregiver Month so we would like to offer our thanks and appreciation to YOU for the care you provide a Veteran everyday.

There are over 40 million family caregivers in the US alone who provide 37 billion hours of care, most spending an average of 18 hours a week caretaking, while 60% are employed at the same time.

**Caregiver Support Coordinator:
Regina Macrae**

Regina.Macrae@va.gov or 515-699-5999 x 4015

Caregiver Support Program Resources

VA Caregiver Support Line: 1-855-260-3274

The Caregiver Support Line is a toll free number (1-855-260-3274) for Caregivers, Veterans and/or Community Partners to call for supportive counseling, information, education, referral to community local resources and/or Caregiver Support Coordinators.

VA Monthly Caregiver Support Line Education Calls:

Participate in calls focusing on strategies to enhance resilience and restore balance. The calls are facilitated by the VA Caregiver Support Line. Typically one topic is offered each month at different times.

VA Peer Support Mentoring Program:

Peer Support Mentoring Program is a program that matches Caregivers with peer mentors, who can provide personalized support, guidance and friendship, experience and knowledge, and wisdom and skills about thriving as a Caregiver.

VA Building Better Caregivers:

Building Better Caregivers™ (BBC) is a six-week online interactive workshop for Caregivers who are caring for someone with dementia, memory problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, a serious brain injury, or any other serious injury or illness. BBC helps Caregivers in two key ways: it offers training in how to provide better care, and it also helps Caregivers learn how to manage their own emotions, stress and physical health.

VA Caregiver Website:

Go to www.caregiver.va.gov and sign up for email updates on caregiver topics. Look at the Diagnosis Care Sheets, download Everyday Tips and Checklists, read other Caregiver stories and more.

VA Guide to Long Term Services:

Go to <http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/guide/LongTermCare/> for VA's complete guide to services and supports to help Veterans and Caregivers make decisions and choices about their future healthcare needs.

There are many other local VA and Community programs and services offered. Call us today to discuss and sign up for any of the above services or learn more about other services and programs.